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**SCHOOL CULTURE
AND FAMILY CULTURE**

reflections within the
context of the pandemic

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SCHOOL CULTURE and FAMILY CULTURE: reflections within the context of the pandemic.

Elvira Souza Lima

In this period of interrogations and uncertainties in relation to the subjects of remote education, classroom teaching and distance learning, it is essential to discuss and reflect on the issue of culture in education. This is a topic that still needs to be discussed in greater depth. We need to better understand the significance of the fact that family and school are both cultural spaces, institutions that are based on culture and that are socially defined as spaces for interaction between human beings who assume in these spaces historically constituted roles.

We are cultural beings and we live in society. We are a biologically social species that has developed over the millennia several social structures that make group life viable. To this end, humans take on roles in the family, at work, at school, in religion, in government, in science and in the arts. Cultural

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behaviors are essential parts of different social roles and are taught directly and indirectly. We learn cultural behaviors, assume roles and many of our decisions are made according to our cultural identity and our social experiences.

Culture constitutes the human being. We know that brain development is a function of biology and of culture. Two institutions predominate in the cultural formation of a person, in his or her developmental and learning processes: the family and the school.

The family is the context of basic formation of the person in relation to the values pertaining to individual and collective identity (values and behaviors) of the social group he or she belongs to. The school is a space of culture, forming the human being within the scope of mankind's historically accumulated knowledge and within the context of social life.

At a time when these two spaces for the development and education of children and young people, the school and the family, have a new logic of integration, it is important and in fact it is

essential to clarify the anthropological and sociological dimensions of the pedagogical context imposed by the pandemic.

I believe that a little background history of my ideas in the present text will be helpful to the reader. It is important to point out that 1994 was the year of implementation of the Escola Plural (Plural School) project (1), in the city of Belo Horizonte (State of Minas Gerais, Brazil) one of the first initiatives of broad changes in a public education system in Brazil, after the military dictatorship of 1964-1985.

One of the important elements of the Escola Plural educational reform was to highlight the factor of culture as a main concern in school education. The understanding of the school as a space of culture was very restricted in the practice of educational pedagogy at that time, although great Brazilian educators such as Darcy Ribeiro, Anísio Teixeira, Paulo Freire, among others, had raised the question of the essential role of culture in the formation of the individual. The city of Belo Horizonte established culture as an axis of reflection for educators in the public education network.

At the beginning of the implementation of the Escola Plural (1994) , I organized a course called *School Culture and Family Culture*. This course was a kind of precursor to a model that would become popular with the arrival of new technologies in education, with face-to-face teaching integrated with distance learning and, today in the context of the corona virus pandemic, the emerging question and practice of hybrid teaching, with the integration of remote and face-to-face teaching.

The face-to-face component of the course was held when I was in Belo Horizonte and could interact directly with the teachers in the form of seminars in periods of 4 hours. Between one face-to-face seminar and another, there were reading assignments, observation practices in the classroom, and meetings with local coordinators.

I recorded video segments (at that time in VHS format) and sent them to the Department of Education. The coordinators, in turn, took care of the pedagogical meetings in which they presented the videos for discussions with the teachers. Along with each video, I sent a short three-page text I

wrote in order to inform and to reflect on the concepts and theoretical approaches around the theme of culture, the axis of the reform. In the texts I also proposed complementary activities, questions to be discussed and answered, as well as suggestions for pedagogical practice. The teachers sent their answers in writing, some answers were elaborated by groups of teachers, others individually. I then used these answers to prepare the next video, working on the fundamental concepts of the themes, the questions that the teachers raised and their requests for clarification and further study.

The project lasted one year and it elaborated a specific model of mixed education, without today's technology, and without the internet. Nonetheless, it was a model that worked very well, mixing face-to-face and remote elements with an interactive perspective of distance learning. It presented in this way a basic and very effective methodological approach. We had the mail as the basic mode of communication, which today is totally unnecessary given the ease with which communication is conducted via the internet.

It is important to note that this reform movement took place in the 1990s in the city of Belo Horizonte and also in several other municipalities promoting educational changes (some quite deep) in various regions of Brazil, some of which I participated actively. Culture at this time became a real concern for elementary education and also for early childhood education. Culture was an educational component that emerged in this process with great vigor and its presence gradually contributed to a change in the main paradigms of school education in many cities in different regions of the country (2).

It would have been very useful if this concern of pedagogy with culture had been maintained in the pedagogical discourse and in educational practice, as the present pandemic situation in the world at large is producing a major cultural change: the school space is moving closer to the family space, bringing a change in the contexts of development of children and young people.

To understand and, above all, to act and make decisions in this new situation, we must consider culture as a key perspective to be explored in the

new times. In order to consider culture, we need to turn to Anthropology. The presence of Anthropology as a theoretical component to reflect and deal with the question of the school in the present context is absolutely fundamental, given that time and space are central axes of anthropological knowledge, and the elements of school space and time are precisely the most directly modified by the quarantine imposed by the pandemic.

The school historically considered

The school was invented about 5000 years ago in different cultures and civilizations in various places on the planet. And although these various cultures and civilizations did not know each other, the school was created at each instance with the following essential characteristics: to reserve a time period and a special space separated from everyday life, and receive new generations in this new, unique environment and context.

The invention of the school in these first centers spread throughout the world and was adopted as a model up to the 20th century, when we witnessed a

fantastic development of universal scope of the school institution in most countries.

The reason for the invention of the school was the fact that the cultural knowledge created by mankind was becoming more complex with the invention of writing and mathematical writing. Passing on this knowledge to the new generations could not be done in everyday life situations, in daily life at home, on the street or in other existing spaces in the community. There was a need for the creation of a new mode, a new way to teach children and young people. For this task, different types of space were organized to house the new generations together with a generation of specialized adults prepared to teach young people. And the school curriculum began with written language, mathematics, poetry, music, geometry, geography and drawing.

Of course, over the millennia the school has undergone many modifications, but this initial core has remained an active long-lasting memory. This long-term nucleus preserves the concept of school: the space and time specifically allocated in a society to receive the new generations and to

transmit to them established knowledge and also the related methods of study so that they have the possibility of appropriating knowledge.

With the development of brain sciences during the second half of the 20th century, from the Second World War onwards, and specially the scientific developments in the last four decades, we learned how the school is in fact a space for preserving formal knowledge and its main function is to ensure that everything that was produced in Science and Art is preserved and placed for access for all mankind, all peoples, all social classes, all ethnicities and genders.

In the 21st century, we can say that with the arrival of new technologies there has been great impact on the issues of school organization with many interrogations, questionings, acknowledgments, criticism and defense of the role of the new technologies.

Technology, without a doubt, opens new horizons for the socialization of knowledge and for greater participation of everyone in the life of culture and in intellectual development. We know, however,

that in almost all societies there is great inequality of access to technology. It depends on financial capabilities, for example, not only to purchase equipment, but also to have resources to pay for internet service to be able to take advantage of everything that technology in digital networks may offer.

In a way, it is possible to say that with all the technological changes, the school has somewhat lost its character as a unique or exclusive space for the socialization of formal knowledge. However, the appropriation of knowledge greatly depends on the teacher, the mentor, the one who guides the learning process. The challenge today is to find ways to integrate classroom teaching and distance learning into new pedagogical models that include culture and the cultural development of students.

Changing the school space

The first major change that happened with the pandemic was that the school space was temporarily moved to the home space, the family space. This is the first major challenge: how families can assume specific roles that are roles

formulated, performed by and culturally constituted for the school. The family, of course, could in no way assume directly a pedagogical role, since the adults at home (mother, father, grandparents) and older brothers are not prepared for the teaching profession and, evidently, cannot exercise the necessary mediation role in brain functioning so that the student, the child or the young person, can systematize memories and form new memories of the knowledge that constitutes the curriculum.

Thus, we find ourselves facing a new reality: after 5000 years of the school maintaining itself as a space and time separated from everyday life, school education had to be shifted, even if momentarily, to the space and time of family life.

We therefore need to deal with the concepts of family culture and school culture, to understand the symbolic universe of each one of these two social and cultural institutions. We also need to understand that the socially defined roles of parents and teachers remain separate roles, distinct roles, both of which are fundamental to the development of children and young people.

Social roles and affective bonds

The school and the family are both very old institutions in human history. Each family microcosm has a history, a history of its own, formed in the historical period when the family lived in proximate generations. Dialectically, the family is always looking towards the future with the new generations that are formed from the family nucleus.

The family nucleus, historically, was and remains in some contexts as an extended nucleus. In other contexts, due to given economic conditions and the various developments of the economic systems of states and countries, the extended nuclei with effective involvement in the lives of various generations have been overcome by small individual nuclei, and specially in the contexts of those people who in the contemporary world move from their original spaces to other geographical spaces, as with immigrants and refugees.

Culture, however, is constitutive of the person and evidently parents pass on to their children their cultural experiences, their values and especially the

symbolic value attributed to the experiences they have. Thus we can understand that a given symbolic universe permeates the senses that are being built for the baby from the moment the child is born. Those symbolic values, as neuroscience informs us, are constituted in combination with long-term memories and with that group of memories that form what we call autobiographical memory. Each of us bears in his memory the symbolic marks brought by family history. School experiences that form semantic memory (of meanings and concepts) are integrated with the symbolic universe of the family history and the individual's autobiographical memory.

As we said above, the school institution has a long history. And this history is made up of values that, in some aspects, have remained for millennia as organizing axes of the structure, of the functioning, and of the representation that the school has in people's minds, the value attributed to it by society and families, values that are also a function of social class, socioeconomic context, ethnic groups, gender, among other important elements.

We can then say that the heritage of the school transmitted in these millennia is very complex. There are consolidated values in this historical path, values that have remained for millennia. On the other hand, changes like the ones happening at the moment with the pandemic, are not so easily understood. Not only are they not immediately understood, they are difficult to assimilate. The biggest challenge at the moment is to understand the symbolic dimension of the roles played by adults in relation to new generations and in relation to the new facts brought by the pandemic.

The family institution, as observed, is also historical. Each family has collective memories of shared experiences within a value system in a given society, but there are, of course, differences from family to family, as families choose and prioritize certain values within the processes that constitute the history of each family. Family ties are built within a broader society, but the memories that are created are particular to people in the circumscribed family group.

The interpretation of facts is mediated by given values and the related processes of symbolic valorization of cultural and individual experiences, as it the case at the moment when each family starts to assume as part of their responsibilities the obligation to participate in school life. As this happens with differences between one family and another, it follows that the teacher of a given class must, necessarily, interact with a number that can be small or large, depending on the school, but which, in many cases, will amount to at least 15 to 20 different families, and can reach 35 or even 40. For the teacher from Middle School on, these interactive processes can reach one hundred or more families. We must assume that we are facing a very complex situation.

In short, fathers and mothers are not teachers, and from the moment that the teacher or their children's teachers enter their homes through technology, for example, or sharing in various ways the function of everyday teaching, a new fact happens: a different model of interaction between adults of the same generation needs to be created so that children and young people feel cared for and taught in a new symbolic context.

For parents to assume an educational role proper to the context of the school, there is in fact the need for mastery of pedagogical knowledge which is achieved through specific studies at university level. Even for parents who are teachers and who have pedagogical knowledge, the situation of teaching their own children is quite different than teaching the children of others. Affective relationships, family history, the way that, for example, conflicts are managed, small habits that make up the family's routine, all become part of this new relationship, which is a relationship of interaction mediated by the formal knowledge of the school and also by school behavior. Parents with children being schooled at home, will need to create new forms of relationship with their children in order to support teachers' guidance and new teaching strategies.

It is indeed in the aspect of school behavior that the greater challenge develops. School behaviors are part of school culture, which has very specific characteristics. To mention just one I can focus on the subject of discipline: the rules of conduct at school are formulated based on the daily organization of school life, which is established by

considering the fact that the school is a system of subgroups of developmental ages, chronological ages of anticipated learning outcomes, that is, given expectations of mastery of the curricular contents. These groups are subject to mandatory minimum rules for positioning the physical body in space, speech, roles and school performance. At home, the rules of discipline are defined by parents looking for a reasonable functioning of the household.

Perhaps it is not evident to many adults that the symbolic cultural nature of the human species produces an undeniable fact: the child feels, sensibly, the experiences at school and at home as distinct spaces, he or she has specific representations of the role of the family or that of his or her home, and of the role of the school and of the adult educators.

Every child and every young person forms specific roles in the school, which are essentially connected with the symbolic and functional physical space of the school. Sharing these roles at home is not an easy thing for children and for young people. At this point, conflicts arise, conflicts that need to be addressed with a view to solving them, that is, the

concern in this new context and its challenges will not be simply with curriculum and even less with evaluation, but with the behaviors and emotions presented in the situation. In order to achieve good results in this hybrid, remote and face-to-face teaching, the construction of a new understanding of the formation and reception of adult educators at home and at school becomes urgent and indispensable to face the necessarily new organization of pedagogy. Such a task requires new actions and new collaborations at school and in the family.

Clearly, the present situation has not only raised the question of the roles that the school plays and will continue to play, but also has implanted the demand for greater understanding and recognition of the role of the teacher by society in general, and by the family in particular. The role of teachers is indispensable, and the new context reaffirms the importance of the teacher.

On the other hand, the family is faced with a new challenge, which is the integration of new elements into their daily life at home, but without assuming the specific role of the teacher.

Thus, a symbolic context of development has been created for children and young people, marked by a new dynamic of cultural relations between adults who educate them at school and in the family. These relationships can only be understood and developed from a more in-depth approach to what culture is and how culture is present in the family, at school, in educational processes, in social interactions and in human development in general.

Notes:

(1) The Escola Plural project was implemented during the administration of mayor Patrus Ananias de Sousa of the Belo Horizonte. Glaura V. de Miranda was the Secretary of Education and Miguel Arroyo was the Assistant Secretary. The initial proposal of Escola Plural was published in ESCOLA PLURAL - Political-pedagogical proposal of the Municipal Education Network of the City of Belo Horizonte. October 1994.

(2) In several municipalities in Brazil substantial educational reforms with similar principles were implemented in which I worked as consultant and I was also in charge of the training of educators and managers, such as Escola Cidadã, in Porto Alegre; Desafio School, in Ipatinga; Escola Sem Fronteiras, in Blumenau; Escola Candanga, in the Federal District (I participated in the Teacher Training Program) and other cities that did not specifically named the reform programs that were implemented, such as São José dos Campos, Caxias, Caçapava and Guarulhos.

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She has developed an innovative theoretical approach that integrates the biological and cultural dimensions of human development, based on her studies, professional practice and multidisciplinary training in neuroscience, anthropology, psychology, linguistics and music.



Her concepts have been successfully applied to education, especially to the area of literacy for the understanding of the processes of teaching and learning how to write.

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